

Constructive Confrontation

Notes

- Confront problems and issues; find solutions and progress.
 - Respect the person and his needs; maintain open communication build a working relationship.

 - Respect is shown by listening and openness to the other person's point of view'

 - Contentiousness is aggressive behavior or attacking behavior toward the other person. Save contentiousness for the athletic arenas.
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In business, behaviors sometimes get out of line resulting in infractions of basic consideration of individuals and the company. Those infractions which are detrimental and divisive require immediate confrontation. The biggest issue is how to confront them in a way that increases the chances you will resolve the problem while maintaining the relationship.

Focus first on what you really want. It's easy to identify what you don't want. You don't want to be hurt or offended. You also don't want the other person to be needlessly hurt or offended. You also want to eliminate unfairness and inappropriate behavior in dealings.

Next, don't judge the other person. It would be easy to assume bad motives on his part:

- he thinks you're an unfit boss
- he doesn't care about anyone but himself
- he's embarrassed by you
- he thinks it's his job to correct you

If you embrace these stories, you are sure to create harsh, resentful feelings in yourself. Those feelings, in turn, are likely to push you toward silence or violence and undermine your ability to get what you really want for the organization and yourself.

To escape these stories and judgments, ask yourself "Why would a reasonable, rational, and decent person behave this way?" What are the possibilities?

- Could it be that he is concerned about the circumstances?
- Could it be he is trying to be helpful in an ineffective way?
- Could it be that he is oblivious to the way he is acting— doesn't realize how he's coming across?
- Might he be projecting some of his insecurities onto you?

Of all these possible explanations, which is actually the case? The answer is: we don't know for sure. Replacing any judgments with questions will create feelings of curiosity and concern instead of hurt and anger. You will then be in an emotional state more conducive to effective communication.

Now it's time to talk. But what do you say? Let's start with what NOT to say:

- Don't start the conversation with an accusation: "You don't care!"
- Don't start with a statement of emotion: "I'm so angry with you."
- Don't play games: "Do you know why I want to talk with you?"

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These approaches almost always create defensiveness and move the conversation away from the possibility of good outcomes.

To help make it safe, begin by sharing your good intentions: “I want to talk with you about -----
My hope is to better understand what’s happening and avoid hurt feelings.”

If you do, the other person will be less likely to think you are trying to hurt or blame and more likely to listen and be open.

Next, factually describe the behaviors you have observed and tentatively share your concerns. Then, ask the other person to help you understand how he sees it.

“On several occasions, I’ve noticed you speaking in a severe tone of voice. For example . . .”
(Share several specific examples.) “I’ve never heard you use that tone of voice with others and I’m starting to wonder why this is happening. My concern is that I think it’s affecting me. Now, maybe I’m being oversensitive or not seeing the whole picture. Please help me understand what’s going on.”

This is the time in the conversations to listen carefully. Truly try to understand other views.

If the other person seems surprised, share a few more specific examples so he understands the behaviors you would like to see altered. If he minimizes the importance of this issue, or shows no interest in modifying behavior, share the consequences you see resulting from the behavior (like confusion and this problem becoming a wedge between you and him, etc.).

As your conversation proceeds, if you remain respectful, there is a high likelihood you will create greater clarity and mutual understanding. Be sure not to bring this conversation to a close without sharing your expectations for the future and asking for agreement or commitment to comply. Avoid vague understandings. Identify the specific behaviors you expect changed...

“From now on, can I count on you to not speak in harsh or severe tones? And can we also agree that if any correction is needed, you will come to me first?”

Now, there’s no guarantee that this approach will get you the results you want. However, two points to keep in mind:

1. Working with others using this approach is more likely to create good results and relationships than the methods most people use (silence or violence).
2. Don’t think of this as a single, one-time only conversation—you are building relationships. Being consistent over time and consistently seeking for mutual purpose will almost always produce mutually beneficial results.